Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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London Diary

Kelly's Pal Mai

By Alexander Cockburn

LONDON: Despite the concentration on Kelly, there are still some very odd ends unaccounted for, regarding this career government man who once ran the British CBW center, Porton Down. Near the beginning of September the Murdoch-owned Times, strongly supportive of Blair, ran three or four stories nibbling at Kelly's odd relationship to Mai Pederson, an attractive Arab-American Kuwaiti woman from Kuwait who had been Kelly's translator when he was working as a UN inspector in Iraq in late 1998.

Pederson is a master sergeant in the USAF and according to the Times story worked at the Navy's Language School in Monterey, long known as a spy school. After Kelly was found dead on July 18 the Pentagon moved her to Virginia and then to a base outside Montgomery, Alabama. She won't speak to the press. Her ex-husband speaks to journalists in dramatic terms about her skills in eliciting information.

Now, 1998 was a time when the US and UK intelligence services were desperate for information about weapons programs in Iraq, also a time when the Iraqis charged accurately that the UN's inspection teams were riddled with US agents. According to colleagues Kelly was convinced in the late 1990s that Saddam was pushing forward with major programs in the CB warfare sector. He thus would have been a valuable target for Mai

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Bush and Blair's Chickens: But No Poultry for the Press?

The postwar travails of the Bush and Blair regimes have been moving at roughly the same tempo. On the business of faked intelligence, the chickens have been slowly but inexorably coming home to roost, albeit with much irksome pomposity about some supposed new corruption of such intelligence estimates from former high standards. Never forget, US intelligence created or endorsed some of the most brazen lies of the twentieth century, starting with Kennedy's "missile gap" thrown in Eisenhower's face.

From the US Congress, indeed from the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Florida Republican Porter Goss, a former CIA officer, have come indignant charges that US intelligence estimates were willfully perverted. Similar charges have been rightly leveled in the UK.

At the same moment US headlines were assigning collapse in popular esteem for Bush at 50 per cent approval or below, in the UK on September 27, the Financial Times announced on its front page, "Blow for Blair as 50% want him to go"

But red herrings abound. After all, the big question, both sides of the Atlantic, is how the two governments concocted their lies about the need to go to war against Iraq, and how these lies were ladled out to the press and thence to the citizenry. (The active connivance of important sectors of the press, is of course another vital part of the story.)

Yet the British press has been in full cry on a marginal issue: what were the precise circumstances in which Kelly's name was leaked? Michael Heseltine, a former Conservative Defense Minister, then deputy prime minister, was one of the few who made the point, in a piece in The Guardian on September 1:

"I vividly remember listening to the news of David Kelly's death. I also remember the coincidental announcement of a judicial inquiry and my reaction to it. … Dr Kelly's death gave a new urgency to the demand for an inquiry but it also provided a lifeline. The government could concede the case for an inquiry, but one with narrow terms of reference that precluded any investigation of the major matters now of growing concern. Lord Hutton was appointed. The terms of reference were tightly drawn. The risks were thus controlled. The media loved it. …To those who inhabit or observe the hothouse of politics this was meat and drink of high protein, but compared to the historic implications of what was happening in the Middle East it was short-term trivia."

Precisely the same diversion is offered in the US, with the pointless hubbub about whether someone in the White House leaked the name of Joe Wilson's wife, a CIA officer. Aside from anything else, we don't understand why leaking her professional identity was supposed to discredit her husband, who had exposed the faked deal between Iraq and Niger for yellowcake. The Democrats are barking excitedly along this trail, which shows how nervous they are of confronting any real issues to do with the war.

But those, like us here at CounterPunch, who said at the time of the publication of the British government's dossier, and after Secretary of State Colin Powell's briefing to the UN Security Council on the threat posed by Iraq, that they were manifestly deceptive, can permit ourselves a wry smile at the belated

(**Bird Talk** *continued on page 6)*

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(**London Days** *continued from page 1)*

Pederson. Whatever else she elicited from the quiet inspector, Sgt Pederson successfully implanted in him a yearning to know more about her own membership of the Bahai sect.

In 1999 he visited Monterey, though he did not contact two other former UN inspectors who lived there. Guiding him was Mai Pederson, who described her role to other Bahais in Monterey as being Kelly's "spiritual advisor". By the fall of 1999 Kelly had become a Bahai, and sometime after that Mai Pederson visited Kelly in England and met his wife, who has made somewhat muted statements about her. Pederson testified at the coroner's enquiry into Kelly's death but refused to let that testimony be transmitted to Lord Hutton. After surfacing in the Hutton enquiry and the press, she's vanished from the Kelly saga, and it is fair to assume that the US exerted great pressure to get her name out of the Kelly saga.

Like other religious groups, the Bahais had a definite interest in the overthrow of their oppressor, Saddam, though orthodox Islam has not smiled on Bahais either.

So, did Kelly have an affair with Pederson and was that affair a factor in his death? Why exactly did he kill himself, assuming that he wasn't murdered? Was it anguish at being exposed by the British government as someone who had lunch with a BBC journalist. It seems unlikely. Maybe he was hoping to run away with the attractive Ms Pederson and when she said this was longer in the cards, decided that life and Mrs Kelly's reproaches weren't worth facing. Maybe he was told by his employers that they were aware of his relationship with Mai Pederson, and that unless he testified to the Select Committee at the BBC's expense, the precise nature of this relationship would be leaked. It's the sort of thing Intelligence Services do, and it's the sort of blackmail that can push some people over the edge.

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Harrods: "Corruption Here Is Rife!" Or Is It?

This is my first time in London since my sister Sarah died a few years ago. More than ever, Indians seem to be running all the significant portals of daily life: the news agents, the cell phone stores, even the fish and spice departments in Harrods. There were Indian police constables at an antiwar demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

Unlike many of the Indians running motels and small businesses across the States, they're a friendly lot. "If he gets promoted, it will be a sure sign that corruption here is rife!" I heard a Indian voice shout indignantly as I descended into the spice section in a basement of Harrods. The voice belonged to an attractive woman at a cash register, addressing her remarks to a small Dickensian-looking white man who was nodding hearty agreement.

I asked whether the offensive promotion was inevitable and, laughing, she said that No, as yet we had to suspend judgment on the moral condition of Harrods' management.

I don't think I've been in Harrods' food halls for thirty years or more and was only there that day because a local branch of Barclays Bank, next to Harrods, had voided its pledge to open at 9am and was putting off the evil hour till 10. I could see through the plate glass window a manager giving a handful of employees an inspirational talk.

Because of Al Qaeda it's no longer a simple matter to open a bank account, something I needed in order to open a cellphone agreement. You have to produce utility bills to your name at an address you have inhabited for 3 months. No doubt an Al Qaeda operative could easily forge such documents, but I tried to go the honest route, and was sent to Barclays International to open some sort of transnational account. A nice Irish lad, patiently helping an African student to fill in some complicated form, took time off to tell me such an account requires a minimum balance of 2000 pounds at all times and "isn't for you". He discounted the Al Qaeda theory and said it was because England was full of rogues and credit card fraud. Probably true. Next day the Indian girls at the phone store told me I'd have to buy the 220-pound Nokia phone for cash. Not even a debit card would do.

Having a bouillabaisse in view, I bought a couple of red mullet, a wrasse, plus some shellfish from the man at the fish counter. All the Harrods cash registers offer a dollar conversion, and as a woman at the fruit counter proudly stated, the store doesn't even charge a commission on any exchange deal. In my memory Harrods food halls had been temples of gastronomic extravagance, with the sort of displays favored by early nineteenth century impresarios. But now, to an eye used to the displays at the Arcata Coop or even the Safeways across California, the vegetable counters looked wan.

I walked north across Hyde Park. There were plenty of dogs, off-leash, taking the fresh morning air. Well-bred terriers predominated, with far fewer of the large and hairy breeds one sees in American city parks. There were less perspiring joggers too and fewer gays, though that may simply have been because of the earliness of the hour. At least in that part of the park there was a lack of the kind of shrubbery favored by the antinomian classes, though there are some useful-looking bushes behind Peter Pan's statue.

My pay-as-you-go cellphone rang and it was JoAnn Wypijewski telling me that Edward Said had died. I spent the next hour writing a farewell, which immediately went up on our CounterPunch website. Normally we don't favor crossovers between the newsletter and the site, but exceptions exist to prove (in the sense of test) the rule.

Edward Said, Dead At 67

A mighty and a passionate heart has ceased to beat.

Edward Said, the greatest Arab of his generation, died in a New York City hospital Wednesday, September 24 at 6.30 pm,

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felled at last by complications arising from the leukaemia he fought so gamely ever since the early 1990s.

We march through life buoyed by those comrades-in-arms we know to be marching with us, under the same banners, flying the same colors, sustained by the same hopes and convictions. They can be a thousand miles away; we may not have spoken to them in months; but their companionship is burned into our souls and we are sustained by the knowledge that they are with us in the world.

Few more than Edward Said, for me and so many others beside. How many times, after a week, a month or more, I have reached him on the phone and within a second been lofted in my spirits, as we pressed through our updates: his trips; his triumphs; the insults sustained; the enemies rebuked and put to flight. Even in his pettiness he was magnificent, and as I would laugh at his fury at some squalid gibe hurled at him by an eighth-rate scrivener, he would clamber from the pedestal of martyrdom and laugh at himself.

He never lost his fire, even as the leukaemia pressed, was routed, pressed again. He lived at a rate that would have felled a man half his age and ten times as healthy: a plane to London, an honorary degree, on to Lebanon, on to the West Bank, on to Cairo, to Madrid, back to New York. And all the while he was pouring out the Said prose that I most enjoyed, the fiery diatribes he distributed to CounterPunch and to a vast world audience. At the top of his form his prose has the pitiless, relentless clarity of Swift.

The Palestinians will never know a greater polemical champion. A few weeks ago I was, with his genial permission, putting together from three of his essays the concluding piece in our forthcoming CounterPunch collection, The Politics of Anti-Semitism. I was seized, as so often before, by the power of the prose: how could anyone read those searing sentences and not boil with rage, while simultaneously admiring Edward's generosity of soul: that with the imperative of justice and nationhood for his people came the humanity that called for reconciliation between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

His literary energy was prodigious. Memoir, criticism, homily, fiction poured from his pen, a fountain pen that reminded one that Edward was very much an intellectual in the nineteenth-century tradition of a Zola or of a Victor Hugo, who once remarked that genius is a promontory in the infinite. I read that line as a schoolboy, wrote it in my notebook and though I laugh now a little at the pretension of the line, I do think of Edward as a promontory, a physical bulk on the intellectual and political landscape that forced people, however disinclined they may have been, to confront the Palestinian experience.

Years ago his wife Mariam asked me if I would make available my apartment in New York, where I lived at that time, as the site for a surprise 40th birthday for Edward. I dislike surprise parties but of course agreed. The evening arrived; guests assembled in my sitting room on the eleventh floor of 333 Central Park West. The dining room table groaned under Middle Eastern delicacies. Then came the word from the front-door. Edward and Mariam had arrived! They were ascending in the elevator. Now we could all hear Edward's furious bellow: "But I don't want to go to dinner with ******* Alex!" They entered at last and the shout went up from seventy throats, Happy Birthday! He reeled back in surprise and then recovered, and then saw about the room all those friends who had traveled thousands of miles to shake his hand. I could see him slowly expand with joy at each new unexpected face and salutation.

He never became blasé in the face of friendship and admiration, or indeed honorary degrees, just as he never grew a thick skin. Each insult was as fresh and as wounding as the first he ever received. A quarter of century ago he would call, with mock heroic English intonation, "Alexand-er, have you seen the latest New Republic? Have you read this filthy, this utterly disgusting diatribe? You haven't? Oh, I know, you don't care about the feelings of a mere black man such as myself." I'd start laughing, and say I had better things to do than read Martin Peretz, or Edward Alexander or whoever the assailant was, but for half an hour he would brood, rehearse fiery rebuttals and listen moodily as I told him to pay no attention.

He never lost the capacity to be wounded by the treachery and opportunism of supposed friends. A few weeks ago he called to ask whether I had read a particularly stupid attack on him by his very old friend Christopher Hitchens in the Atlantic Monthly. He described with pained sarcasm a phone call in which Hitchens had presumably tried to square his own conscience by advertising to Edward the impending assault. I asked Edward why he was surprised, and indeed why he cared. But he was surprised and he did care. His skin was so, so thin, I think because he knew that as long as he lived, as long as he marched onward as a proud, unapologetic and vociferous Palestinian, there would be some enemy on the next housetop down the street eager to dump sewage on his head.

Edward, dear friend, I wave adieu to you across the abyss. I don't even have to close my eyes to savor your presence, your caustic or merry laughter, your elegance, your spirit as vivid as that of d'Artagnan, the fiery Gascon. You will burn like the brightest of flames in my memory, as you will in the memories of all who knew and admired and loved you.

Paradise in Cookham

As one who once wrote a book titled The Golden Age is In Us, I took myself off on a Saturday to look at an exhibition in the National Gallery on Trafalgar Square, called Paradise, a traveling show which had already been shown in Bristol and Newcastle, attracting 160,000 people, apparently double what they would have expected normally in those galleries. People want to know the lineaments of paradise, whose earthly possibilities utopians used to spend much time usefully describing, though not much any more.

The show turned out to be patchy, with the curator scraping together a show from available ingredients, such as a Boucher, a Gauguin, a Constable, a Monet, a Rothko, a couple of Renaissance paintings and so forth. But making my visit entirely worthwhile there was one marvelous painting, one of Stanley Spencer's Cookham paintings about the Last Judgment, done in 1934. It shows a dustman resurrected in his beefy wife's arms, she

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in "ecstatic communion with the dustman's corduroy trousers" as Spencer put it. Other dustmen and women, plus a cat, surround the couple.

"I feel in this Dustman picture, " Spencer wrote, "that it is like watching and experiencing the inside of a sexual experience. They are all in a state of anticipation and gratitude to each other. They are each to the other, and all to any one of them, as peaceful as the privacy of a lavatory. I cannot feel anything is Heaven where there is any forced exclusion of any sexual desire...

"The picture is to express a joy of life through intimacy .All the signs and tokens of home life, such as the cabbage leaves and teapot which I have so much loved that I have had them resurrected from the dustbin because they are reminders of home life and peace, and are worthy of being adored as the dustman is. I only like to paint what makes me feel happy. As a child I was always looking on rubbish heaps and dustbins with a feeling of wonder. I like to feel that, while in life things like pots and brushes and clothes etc may cease to be used, they will in some way be reinstated, and in this Dustman picture I try to express something of this wish and need I feel for things to be restored. That is the feeling that makes the children take out the broken teapot and empty jam tin."

Small things, but also a big new thing in Spencer's life, namely his attraction to a new arrival in Cookham, Patricia Preece and her companion Hilda. Patricia was famous as having been the cause of the death of W.S. Gilbert. Aged seventeen in 1911 and under her birth name of Ruby she caught the eye of randy old Gilbert, who invited her to come for a swim in the lake at his Harrow home. As she plashed about he conceived, or professed to conceive the notion that she was out of her depth and might drown. Swimming out, no doubt planning to clasp her in a savior's embrace, he had a heart attack and died in front of her. The press had a fine time at the describing her as a 'fair-haired seventeen-year old schoolgirl'.

It's the presence of Patricia, though not her image, that suffuses the painting with sexual ecstasy, even though it's the ample Hilda who'd fled from Cookham to her mother in Hampstead, who is in ecstatic communion with the corduroy trousers.

It's as earthy and beautiful an expression of the paradise of carnal passion as Joyce's pages in Ulysses about Bloom looking at Gertie. Though Spencer was a member of the Royal Academy and had the right to hang four paintings in the annual show, it was rejected, prompting his furious resignation. This great painting was without a purchaser till a Liverpool gallery bought it in 1947.

Whoever thought to put Spencer into the Paradise exhibit got it right. In ancient times death in the Golden Age was always incorporated into life as a sensate pleasure, followed immediately by an improved life, the way most folks including all those flocking to the show in Bristol and Newcastle would like it. In those earlier times they had Saturnalia which meant not so much drunken sex sprees as subversion of the conventional moral order.

In the pre-spring festival senators and slave owners would put aside their stately togas and kindred marks of rank and don shapeless garments known as syntheses (the dialectic made cloth). The prime metaphor of the Saturnalia was freedom from all bondage – the bondage of poverty, of wealth, of the laws and, above all, time. Slaves set up a mock king and were served delicious fare by their masters. Such delicacies, given to the powerless by the powerful, were called "second tables", because temporarily, at the level of palpable fantasy, the tables were turned. Each household became a mimic republic, in which slaves held first rank. The law courts were closed. Gifts were exchanged. The Lords of Misrule reigned. There was always something dangerous about jovial Saturn, an element of the hooved and the horned. Later, debauchery gained the upper hand and the revolutionary element began to drain away. Witness the rituals of Comus and Rex at the New Orleans carnival.

So paradise, the golden age, is fun and it's subversive, which means for us on the radical/left/libertarian end it should be our goal and our sales pitch. We don't want a paradise conceived of by Quakers, or social-democratic engineers, or by John Donne, who prophetically conceived of Paradise as a modern airport waiting lounge: "*Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity; in the habitations of thy glory and dominion world without end.*"

Galloway: Bush as The Manna

I stepped out of the National Gallery and into Trafalgar Square, where the Socialist Workers' Party, CND and other peace groups were holding an anti-Blair demonstration. Later the press billed it as a disappointing turn-out, and in truth there were probably less than 10,000 which seemed to me respectable as a postwar showing, but these days you needed a crowd of 100,000 or more to get respect, which is sad. George Galloway, threatened with expulsion from the Labor Party for his denunciation of the attack on Iraq, was giving a spirited address in his broad Scottish accent.

At the top of his form Edward Said's prose has the pitiless, relentless clarity of Swift. The Palestinians will never know a greater polemical champion.

"My friends," (I quote Galloway from sketchy memory), "there is a very dangerous illusion, which we must combat, that somehow it is better that the invaders of Iraq to be under the blue helmets of the UN, rather than the flags of the US and UK… As a believer, I can give thanks for the manna from heaven that has descended upon us in the form of a scheduled visit here for three days in November of George Bush [hoots of derision from the crowd]. Let us give him a fierce welcome. Let's take Guy Fawkes down from the top of the bonfire, and put George Bush up there instead!" [More hoots.]

That night, on Channel 4 I watched Stephen Frears' The Deal, about a bargain supposedly struck between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, when both were vying for the post of shadow prime minister after the sudden death of John Smith in the mid-1990s. Over dinner in the Granita restaurant Brown reputedly stood down in return for a vague pledge from Blair that he would turn over the

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John Donne prophetically conceived of Paradise as a modern airport waiting lounge.

post to him after six years.

The visual idiom of Frears' docudrama was frenetic , with endless close ups of smirking Blair, glowering Brown and prissy Mandelson. Without the sound track , persons uninformed about the political background could have thought they were viewing a soap about a gay triangle. The busier the camera angles got (peering up from below, hovering behind Blair's ear) the more null became the political content. Then, two days later there was the real Brown, less striking than the virtual Brown, giving a speech at the Labor conference in Bournemouth about the need for the party to return to its basic values, a call as specious as similar language the other side of the Atlantic about the soul of the Democratic Party.

The Caledonian Road

One house I stayed in for a few days was in Thornhill Square, three quarters of a mile or so north of Kings Cross. The neighborhood is on the way up in the world, but still agreeably humble along Caledonian Road itself. Each morning I would walk along, enjoying the simple dramas of the shop fronts, the hopes and despairs of small retail entrepreneurs. The tasteful element always hate them and dream of bulldozers, but I love streets like this, such as the old Main in Montreal twenty years ago, or Lincoln Boulevard today south of I-10 in Los Angeles.

Running north on the east side of the street, from the corner of Caledonian Road and Richmond St we have: a smart pub called the Tarmon, with a fine display of hanging floral baskets; Caly Gents Hairdresser (wash and cut 8 pounds, dry cut 6 pounds, child's cut 5 pounds, OAP 4 pounds), a smart looking place; Skaters take-away, with pictures of a chicken and a fish; Uncle Eric Kebab House; Pleasure Garden (grimy, shuttered, broken signage advertising SAU , SPA and UB); Kings Pizza; double frontage of "Kaim Todner, solicitor, crime, prisoners' rights, mental health, family"; print and copy shop; Caledonian supermarket, (a small store with good vegetables on display); Austin Daniel Property; Guzel Cafe and Restaurant; smart double front of Istanbul Social Club; Dental Surgeon (shuttered and barred, with note, "Dr Kylahs would be pleased to attend Dr Mean's patients, or any other patients, at his surgery at 2 Biddland Road)"; four more shuttered stores and bags of rubble, including Logman Ltd, "specializing in watermelons"; William Hill, betting shop (Ladbroke's across the road); E&A Drycleaner; Leonard Villa, picture framer; Somal Hair and Beauty Center ("stand-up sunbeds, hair extension, nail extension"); post office, also newsagent); KIG café and restaurant, with sign in window, "Full breakfast, bacon, bubble, eggs, beans, sausage, mushroom, tomato, black pudding, 2 slices of bread, tea or coffee, 4 pounds 50"; chemist; two shuttered stores; smart double façade of Rigpa Tibetan Buddhist Center ; drear frontage of London Taxi Club; Wear-2-Rave, selling trendy gear; Parker Sales and Lettings; Islington Bar, under repair, then Bridgeman Road.

Round the corner was Islington Council's West Branch library, with comfortable reading room, nicely stocked shelves, and a big children's library across the hall. The rack by the entrance featured helpful pamphlets for owners of missing cats and dogs (contact the Lost Dogs Line, run by the Metropolitan Police and Battersea Dogs Home,); for male victims of sexual assault ("research shows that the majority of sexual assaults against men are committed by heterosexual males"); for frustrated litigators ("Have You Been Injured? Was Someone Else to Blame?"), issued by the Law Society; for the worried, a detailed pamphlet titled "NHS Abortion (termination of pregnancy services in Camden and Islington)". Denizens of hysterical America, note the tranquil, confident tone: "Having An Abortion: This section describes how the NHS abortion service is organized, and how to access it. If you have decided that abortion is the right option for you, your GP or local family planning clinic can refer you. If your GP has a conscientious objection to abortion, he/she should say so and refer you to another doctor who does not hold these views."

On the back of the pamphlet a paragraph calmly explains that the pamphlet has been developed "for any woman living in the boroughs of Camden or Islington who is thinking about ending her pregnancy". This paragraph is reproduced in Turkish, Bengali, Chinese and Greek.

The bookcases carried good selections of fiction, biography, politics and so on. I picked out a volume of the Hart Davis-Lyttlelton Letters, exchanged in the 1950s between two cultured gents, one a teacher, the other a publisher. Indeed, Rupert Hart Davis published the first volume of my father's autobiography, In Time of Trouble in 1956.

My eye falls on a quote from William Johnson who, under the name Cory, instructed upper-class youth at Eton between 1834 and 1872: One of the faculties a good education develops, Cory wrote, is to "express assent or dissent in graduated terms." I was still laughing over this as I ate a plate of chicken kebab and fresh salad, in the Guzel Café round the corner, cost 4 pounds 50. CP

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hubbub in the press. It was obvious to any objective soul months ago what was going on. And then we have to ask, Will there be no proper airing of the role of the press in all this?

An example: on September 29 the International Herald Tribune carried an NYT story by Douglas Jehl to the effect that the Defense Intelligence Agency had concluded in an internal review that the value of Iraqi defectors as informants on WMDs had been scant, albeit costly to the US taxpayer. The story mentioned in passing, near the end, that the Times had relayed such claims. This scarcely does justice to the role of New York Times reporter Judith Miller in touting uncritically, con amore, the myths of the defectors. The Times went after the petty-fraudster, Jayson Blair, and beat its breast. Miller did far, far worse.

The British enquiry by Lord Hutton into the circumstances of Kelly's death was intended by the Blair government as a detour from the main issue of bogus, government-endorsed "intelligence" about Saddam's nuclear and CBW arsenal, but the grudging testimony of men like John Scarlett, chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee has provoked fierce derision in the press about the quality of the infamous government dossier, "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction", published by the British government last year.

An easy way of appreciating its true intentions (to wit, misrepresentation, the prime function of government intelligence) is to compare the final draft of this dossier with an earlier one, prepared on September 2. We can do this because the Hutton enquiry extracted the earlier draft from Whitehall.

It becomes clear that as the deadline for publication of the final dossier approached, its editors in 10 Downing St, with Blair the chief rewrite-man, decided that it was not, from the desired, alarmist point of view, cutting the mustard.

The earlier proposed title of the dossier was briskly emended, from "Iraq's Program for Weapons of Mass Destruction" to the brusquer, more vivid "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction". Blair, via Campbell, forced Scarlett to say that Saddam could produce a nuclear weapon between one and two years" whereas the earlier draft merely said that were sanctions against Iraq to be lifted, it would take Saddam's Iraq "at least five years to produce a weapon".

Amanpour said that CNN was cowed by the Bush crowd and FoxNews.

The notorious 45-minute gap was inflated, giving the eager British press the impression that British troops in Cyprus could be peppered with nuclear and chemical munitions within 45 minutes of Saddam's order to deploy them. In the original draft, itself entirely inaccurate, the 45-mionute reference was to deployment of short-range battlefield weapons.

On September 19 Jonathan Powell, Blair's chief of staff, emailed both the pliant Scarlett and Blair's pr chief at the time, Alastair Campbell, "I think the statement… that 'Saddam is prepared to use chemical and biological weapons if he believes his government is under threat' is a bit of a problem… It backs up the argument that there is no CBW threat and we will only create one if we attack him. I think you should redraft the para." He was obeyed.

In a furious column last Monday in The Independent, Andreas Whittam Smith, that newspaper's founding editor, not a rabble rouser by instinct or avocation, announced, "I am ashamed of my country's leader". He called the September 24 dossier "the most worthless state paper ever published", stressing simultaneously "The dossier was Mr. Blair's dossier and nobody else's". He concluded, "I believe that Mr. Blair should honorably accept responsibility for one of the worst foreign policy disasters which the country has ever experienced, and resign forthwith."

Soon we will be reading thoughtful stories about the public's cynicism towards the claims of government. Will we hear much about the culpability of the press? We would have said, a couple of months ago, No. But maybe the dismal performance has tortured some decent souls. Not long ago Christiane Amanpour of CNN said publicly her own network had been intimidated by the Bush administration and by the bellicose coverage of its rival, Fox. We're not among Amanpour's fans, but she was brave to do that. Press proprietors relish criticism a lot less than does someone like the testy Rumsfeld. Amanpour showed the way. Let's have others, from the network anchors down, step up to the plate. It would clear the air of a lot of hypocrisy. CP

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